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Wise One, Stupid One, and the Three Magic Gifts

Once there was and once there was not a widow living in a village with her two sons. One of these brothers was very intelligent and the other was very stupid, and people referred to them as Wise One and Stupid One. When their mother died, the two sons decided to live apart from each other, partly because this is customary in Turkey and partly because their wives did not get along very well with each other. They built a second house and barn on the family land.

The mother had had a large herd of livestock, including a number of oxen and water buffaloes. These animals had to be divided in some way. Wise One said, "There is no need to count, 'One for you, one for me; one for you, one for me.' There is an easier way to do it. Let us simply allow the animals to choose the barn in which they wish to live."

"All right," said Stupid One

That day when the village herd was brought in from the pasture,¹ the animals belonging to the two brothers were ju

¹Affluent farmers often have their own herdsmen to tend

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turned loose near their homes. Wise One had given Stupid One the new house and barn, and he himself had kept the old buildings. Quite naturally, most of the animals went to the barn in which they had always lived. One cow was pushing its newborn calf along with her nose, and that calf accidentally stumbled into Stupid One's barn. It was the only animal of the large family herd that Stupid One inherited.

The next day Stupid One said to his wife, "What can we do with one small calf? I shall take it to town and sell it, for we have neither salt nor lamp oil."² Tying together the front legs and then the back legs of the calf, he hoisted the animal to his shoulders and started for town. It was a long walk from his village to the nearest town. Along the way the road entered a forest, and because the young man was very stupid, he thought that perhaps the marketplace was there. Tying the calf to a beach tree, he said to the tree, "I want to sell this calf to you. Would you like to buy it?"

their livestock. Small farm owners usually have their livestock taken daily to the village pasture by a herdsman hired for that purpose. This community herdsman gathers the villagers' herds each morning, takes them to the village pasture (where he watches them throughout the day), and returns them to their respective owners in the early evening.

²This is a figure of speech meaning to be without supplies. Many popular metaphors in Turkish involve a rhyme or near-rhyme. This one contains a near-rhyme, tuz meaning salt and gaz meaning petroleum oil or gas.

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It was windy that day, and the trees were bending back and forth. As their branches rubbed together, they made a kind of groaning noise. Stupid One thought that the tree was answering him.

"Ah, I am glad that you wish to buy the calf," he said to the tree. "How much will you pay me for it?"

Again the tree branches rubbed together and made a groaning noise.

"Oh, you wish to pay me forty-five liras? All right. You can have the calf for that price. I'll just leave it here and come back tomorrow to collect the money." (He was doing all of the talking himself, both selling the calf and buying the calf!)

Stupid One returned home and said to his wife, "I have sold the calf for forty-five liras. I shall go back in the morning to collect the money for it."

The following morning he returned to the forest to collect the price of the calf. He went to the beech tree, but the tree neither gave him any money nor spoke a word to him. Stupid One said, "Hey, you! I want either my money or my calf back!" When the beech tree still remained silent, Stupid One said, "Very well! You will see what I shall do to you!" He went home and got a pickax. Returning to the tree, he

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said, "For the last time, I am warning you! Either my money or my calf!" Then he took the pickax and began to dig the dirt away from the roots of the tree.

All of a sudden, an Arab³ sprang up from the hole he was digging. "What do you want?" the Arab asked.

"Either my money or my calf!" said Stupid One.

"I know nothing about either your money or your calf," said the Arab. "Take this little dining table,⁴ but don't you ever dare order it, 'Open, my table! Open, my table!' Then the Arab disappeared

On the way home Stupid One felt hungry, and he could not resist saying, "Open, my table! Open, my table!" As soon as he said this, the top of the table unfolded and on it were spread all kinds of good food. After he had eaten everything that he wanted, he said, "Close, my table! Close, my table!" The top of the table immediately folded shut again

³When a jinn (genie) appears in a Turkish folktale, it is usually in the guise of an Arab. Quite often it is given Negroid features and said to be black. Although most Arabs are not black, and though Arabs are among the Turks' nearest neighbors, this misconception persists in the oral tradition.

⁴This little table is a sofra, and that is what the narrator calls it. A sofra is a very low table--the legs are often no more than twelve inches high--used by Turkish peasants who sit on the floor when they eat. Diners sit around the table with their legs folded beneath them, tailor-fashion.

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A few days later Stupid One said to his wife, "I want to have a Mevlüt⁵ service for my mother. We can have a large feast after the service, and I shall invite the padişah to attend."

When the Mevlüt service was over, the feast began. Stupid said, "Open, my table! Open, my table!" He and his wife then carried all of the food it provided to a large table where the guests were all seated. By opening and closing the table several times, he produced a great quantity of excellent food.

The padişah observed all of this, and he was amazed at the extraordinary little dining table. Wishing to have it himself, he had a cabinet maker build an exact reproduction of Stupid One's magic table. Several days later, one of the padişah's servants secretly entered Stupid One's house, stole his magic table, and left the new one in its place

The next time Stupid One and his wife wished to eat, he said, as usual, "Open, my table! Open, my table!" But the

⁵Mevlüt (Mevlit) is a musical piece, a cantata, composed by Süleyman Çelebi in the year 1409 at Bursa. It celebrates the birth and life of Mohammed. It has long been used as a requiem service, performed shortly after the funeral and then again a year later. It may, however, be performed at any time. Inasmuch as it involves a number of musicians and singers, it is rather costly for most ordinary Turks, especially villagers. Near the end of the performance, candy and/or other sweets are distributed in little packets to all members of the audience.

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new table did not open. Taking the table and his pickax to forest, he again began digging dirt away from the roots of the beech tree.

The Arab appeared and asked, "What do you want now?"

"I want either my money or my calf!" said Stupid One.

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"I don't know anything about either your calf or your money, but here is a special donkey for you," said the Arab.

Stupid One accepted the donkey and began riding homeward on it. Along the way he said, "Chush!"⁶ to the donkey, and when he did so, he heard something hit the ground, Putt.⁷ Looking behind the donkey, he saw that the sound had been made by a gold coin that the donkey had dropped. When he reached home, he said repeatedly, "Chush! Chush! Chush! Chush!" until the donkey had defecated a whole saddlebag of gold coins. In this way he became very rich.

One day shortly after that, Stupid One said to himself, padişah goes to the public bath on a donkey. Why shouldn't I do the same?" He rode to the bath and hitched his donkey to a rail where other donkeys were tied. When he was ready to pay his entrance fee, he realized that he had no money in

⁶Drivers of donkeys and oxen in Turkey say Deh! for Giddap! and Chush! (pronounced choosh) for Whoa!

⁷Onomatopoeia for the dull sound made by something that strikes the ground.

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his pocket. He said to the attendant, "Let me go and get some money from my donkey."

In the meantime the padişah had arrived at the bath. The hitching rail was already crowded. To make room for his own donkey, the padişah pushed Stupid One's donkey a little to one side and then said "Chush!" When the donkey heard this sound, it let fall a golden coin. Amazed to see this, the padişah left his own donkey there and immediately took back to the palace the magic donkey of Stupid One

When Stupid One came out of the bathhouse to get some money for admission, he said, "Chush!" to what he supposed was his magic donkey. But no gold fell from the donkey. He said, "Chush! Chush! Chush!" several times, but the donkey did not drop a single gold coin.

Returning at once to his home, Stupid One got his pickax and went to the forest. Once more he began to dig out the from around the roots of the beech tree. As before, the Arab arose from the hole and asked, "What do you want?"

"I want either my money or my calf!" said Stupid One.

"I know nothing about your money or your calf, but here is a pumpkin for you. Don't you ever dare to say, 'Open, my pumpkin! Open, my pumpkin

Stupid One took the pumpkin and started home with it. Although he had been warned not to open it, he stopped halfway

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home and said, "Open, my pumpkin! Open, my pumpkin!" As soon as he said that, two hammers came forth from the pumpkin and started to beat him on the head. They beat him severely until he finally remembered to say, "Close, my pumpkin! Close, my pumpkin!" When he said this, the two hammers returned to the pumpkin

When he got home, the first thing that he did was to warn his wife, "Don't you ever dare to say, 'Open, my pumpkin! Open my pumpkin!'" His wife heard him say this, but she imagined that the pumpkin must be something like the magic table and the gold-dropping donkey. One day she became so curious about the contents of the pumpkin that she finally said, "Open, my pumpkin! Open, my pumpkin!" No sooner had she said these words than the two hammers came out of the pumpkin and started beating her on the head. Luckily, her husband saw this happen, and he quickly said, "Close, my pumpkin Close, my pumpkin!" Thereupon, the hammers returned to the pumpkin.

It was not long before the young man discovered that it was the padişah who had stolen both his magic table and his donkey. He said to the padişah, "You have taken both my magic table and my donkey. Now I want to give you this pumpkin as a present, but be sure that you do not say, 'Open, my pumpkin! Open, my pumpkin.'" However, the padişah, remembering the magic benefits of the table and the donkey, believed the

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pumpkin might also have some miraculous qualities that he would enjoy. To find out, he said, "Open, my pumpkin! Open, my pumpkin!" The hammers came out and began beating the padişah on the head. The padişah shouted to the young man, "I'll give you back your table and your donkey if only you will stop these hammers!"

When he left the palace, Stupid One had all three of the gifts provided by the Arab: his table, his donkey, and his pumpkin. They were his source of food, his source of gold and his protection against his enemies. In this way he also gained superiority over his brother, Wise One.